

August XX 2009

To: The Western Europe and Others Group

Your Excellency,

We are writing to encourage your government, as a member of the Western Europe and Others Group (WEOG) of the United Nations, to commit to principled policies with regard to the UN Human Rights Council elections. Starting with the upcoming 2010 elections, we urge WEOG members to declare their support for competitive elections to the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) and commit to ending the practice of vote trading for HRC elections.

The reformed election process outlined by UNGA Resolution 60/251 implies that there should be competition for Council seats allotted to each regional group, and that the UN General Assembly should vote for candidates based on their commitment to promote and protect human rights. UN Member States need a real choice in order to elect members that will “uphold the highest standards in the promotion and protection of human rights” and “fully cooperate with the Council.”

This year, however, WEOG members failed to live up to these principles with the decision to present the same number of candidates as seats available in their region. Although the US decision to run for the Council for the first time was a positive step, the lack of competition among Western countries after New Zealand dropped out of the race sent the wrong message to the other regional groups. WEOG’s “clean slate” signaled a disregard for competition and, in effect, undermined the Group’s credibility to encourage rights-respecting countries to compete with abusive regimes.

In addition to “clean slates”, the persistence of vote trading among states continues to mar the HRC elections process. When states vote trade for the Council, securing votes for other UN bodies takes priority over the human rights records of states. Many Western states have been engaged in vote trading, which not only has contributed to abusive states securing seats on the Council, but also damaged the ability of Western states to effectively and credibly criticize the rights records of states. This double standard must come to an end.

The electoral process established in resolution 60/251 was designed to ensure a more human-rights-committed membership and reflected a large part of what was to make the Human Rights Council an improvement over the Commission on Human Rights. Condoning “clean slates” and vote trading marks a clear and dangerous step back from these reforms and damages the credibility of the Human Rights Council, as well as its ability to respond to human rights violations. It becomes practically futile to assess candidates on the basis of their human rights records and pledges. On the contrary, when states support competition and voting based solely on the human rights records of states, the UN General Assembly has shown that it generally favors states committed to human rights promotion over systematic rights violators.

In preparation for the 2010 election, we call on WEOG members to adopt as a national and group policy that WEOG will always put forward competitive slates for election, and that members will not vote trade for the Human Rights Council. Adopting these core procedures as a group will allow WEOG to benefit from healthy competition while ensuring members are on level playing field. It will restore WEOG’s

leadership on procedural issues at the Council and serve as the right model for other regional groups to follow.

We look forward to a principled election for the two open WEOG seats. We believe WEOG's support for strong procedural reform will aid in the positive development of the Human Rights Council.

With assurances of our highest regard,